



## Chronicle

Sandy Dodge of Pasadena grooms a toy poodle named Trixie at the World Series of Dog Shows on Thursday.

MELISSA PHILLIP: CHRONICLE



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WORLD SERIES OF DOG SHOWS

### Cashing in on the dog's life

The next best thing to a blue ribbon? Taking home a few luxury items for your finicky Fifi

By ANDREW GUY JR.

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Her kids wanted a dog. She didn't want what comes with being a dog owner — accidents. But Mary Oakes' two young children wouldn't stop begging, and finally she and her husband gave in.

"I just wanted a dog that was housebroken," the woman from Alpharetta, Ga., recalled Thursday. "I like to keep my house clean and didn't want to handle all the things that happen, you know, when the dog can't get outside in time."

But Oakes found entrepreneurial inspiration in her initial reluctance. Two years after taking on the pet, she has a vendor's booth at the Reliant Park World Series of Dog Shows, offering a \$19.97 device she created promising peace of mind for dog owners.

The device, called the Tell Bell, is a small ringer to be placed near the door. Once dogs are trained, Oakes said, they will tap the bell whenever they need a potty break.

The Tell Bell was one of many pet accessories available for sale at Reliant Center, on the dog show's opening day. The event, expected to draw 40,000 visitors and participants, continues through Sunday.

Anyone doubting whether we pamper our pets need only wander the dog show concourse. Dog lovers can find almost anything, from custom-designed dog houses to pricey shampoos — \$19 for a small bottle for coarse-haired dogs — to the obligatory doggie sweaters and collars.

According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, Americans spent \$38.5 billion on pets in 2006. For 2007, that number is expected to reach \$40.8 billion.

"I think it's because people aren't having kids like they used to, and they use dogs as a substitute," said Kim Lawrence of Houston, who was helping run the silent auction for upscale, custom-designed dog houses (starting bids: \$250). "What do they call them? DINKS? People with no kids? I think that's what's going on."

But she has another theory as well.

"It's just that unconditional love," Lawrence said. "There's nothing fake about a dog. They either love you or they hate you. You pretty much know where they are coming from. So why not spoil them a little bit?"

Meanwhile, Eva, the privileged Great Dane featured on the Houston Chronicle's front page Thursday, won her first judging competition.

The 2-year-old placed first in the Great Dane Specialty category, competing against other Great Danes.

Today and Saturday she will compete against other breeds; if she wins Saturday, she will advance to the best of show competition on Sunday.

"I told you this was stressful," joked handler Joel Rosenblatt.

#### RESOURCES

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#### WANT TO GO?

• **What:** Reliant Park World Series of Dog Shows at Reliant Center

• **When:** Through Sunday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. daily

• **Cost:** \$10 at the gate, or through Ticketmaster, with senior discounts. No charge after 3 p.m. Children 12 and younger free with an adult.

• **Parking:** \$8

• **Details:** 713-791-9069;  
[www.reliantdogshows.com](http://www.reliantdogshows.com)